



Good Afternoon, Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Joyce Lewis and I am the Vice President of Key Human Services, Birth to Three; a small Birth to Three program in the North Region for the past 15 years.

First, I would like to thank you all for your support of Birth to Three throughout the years and especially this year. It is a clear statement of your commitment to the wellbeing and success of Connecticut's young children and their families. Thank you.

I ask you now to consider a difficult action in these times but one that grows more critical every day. I ask you to significantly reduce the sliding fee scale for parent cost participation. The parent cost participation fees are a barrier for our families. Every day this barrier becomes more formidable. Increasing demands and costs are chipping away at the families from every direction. In these most difficult times they must weigh their impression that their child is making progress against the money that is needed to cover other essentials, home, heat, food, gas. After the first 2 free months, many leave Birth to Three because they can't take on that additional financial commitment and hope that 2 months were enough for their child and family. We see this

happening more every day. Imagine being forced to decide based on hope alone between your family's present and your family's future.

In December, we saw an unprecedented 5% of our families suspended from services due to an unpaid balance of three months of fees. This is another indicator of the escalation of this barrier. To further define the scope of this issue, Key is a program that offers a scholarship program to families to ensure access to Birth to Three regardless of fiscal hardship/defray the hardship/cost. Two of the families on suspension were receiving the scholarship. Our scholarship program has also grown substantially. Since the scholarship program was implemented we have had an enrollment of 2-3 % of our families, this winter the scholarship program has an enrollment of 12 – 15 % of families.

In this era of responsible stewardship, our actions cannot be completely altruistic, we must see the cost benefit. Therefore I have included the legislative talking points developed by the Birth to Three Interagency Coordinating Council. Clearly, Birth to Three demonstrates a considerable long term cost savings to the state for each child served. I believe that these cost savings greatly exceed the loss of revenue incurred by this reduction in the scale. Revenue is also decreasing due to withdrawal from Birth to Three as well as months on suspension.

Financial pressures continue to grow.

Choices need to be made.

Gambles need to be taken.

Don't let Birth to Three families be the losers.

I ask you today to consider the formidable barrier that parent cost participation presents for Connecticut's children and families and to significantly reduce the sliding fee scales.

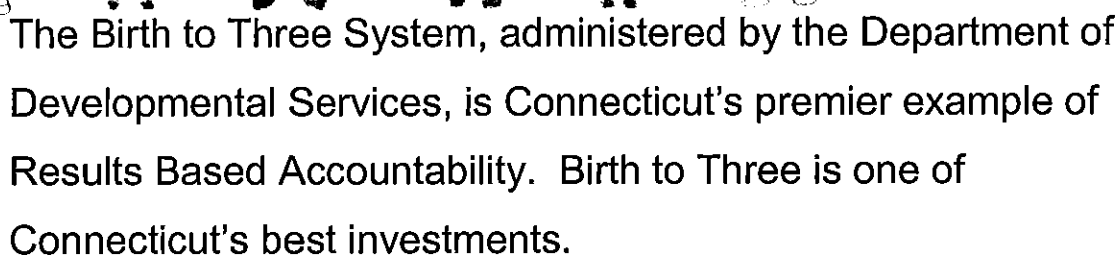
Balance the budget with an eye to the future rather than on the backs of
our families!

A thought to leave you with :

This may be our livelihood but these are their lives!

Thank you for your time and attention.





Birth to Three helps to reduce state and local expenditures.

\$20,250 = The average annual cost of a child in special education

- Birth to Three is one of Connecticut's best investments.

A black and white line drawing of two groups of diverse children holding hands in a line. The group on the left consists of six children of various ethnicities and ages, including a girl in a dress, a boy in a sweater, a girl in a shirt and skirt, a girl in a long-sleeved shirt and pants, a girl in a dress, and a boy in a sweater and pants. The group on the right consists of five children, including a girl in a dress, a boy in a shirt and pants, a boy in a shirt and pants, a girl in a long-sleeved shirt and pants, and a boy in a shirt and pants. The children are all smiling and holding hands, symbolizing unity and support.